The Fullest Revelation of Holiness
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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We...in coming to the Lord's table today, wanna direct our thoughts at...at this table. And, of course, through the years, I have many times stood before you at the Lord's table and drawn your attention to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how many hundreds of times I might have done that, every time is a special joy and a special thrill. And it's...it's never a challenge to try to find something to say that I haven't said. It's always a challenge to try to clear down all the options and come up with one. But it didn't take very long this time, because I...I was drawn to the...to the glorious and great subject of the holiness of God. And that's where I wanna take you in your thinking, as we come to the Lord's table.

The holiness of God is manifest here. It is manifest at the cross, and we will come to that when we come to the culmination of what I wanna say to you. But I wanna begin with a very broad look at the holiness of God. We know that God is holy. That He is holy, holy, holy. Sometimes we might think that that's just one of the attributes of God. That's just part of...of what God is. But the holiness of God is never to be conceived of as a single attribute...as if it were one among many. Rather, the holiness of God is a general term, and it refers to the concept of God's consummate perfection and total glory. The holiness of God is His infinite moral perfection...which really covers all of His other infinite attributes. It is the crown of...Godhood.

Holiness is God's essence. Holiness, then, cannot be regarded as merely a distinct attribute. It is the reality of all God's attributes, all God's moral perfections together. And that is why Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, 'My name is Holy. My name is Holy.'" That is holiness defines who God is. In other words, to say that God is holy is shorthand. It's verbal shorthand for summing up who God is. Holiness encompasses all that God is. If you go back to the Old Testament and look at the word holy and see its Hebrew root, it would be the word Kiddush. It means to be distinct or separate. It doesn't really define it. It just means separate, unique, apart from. If you look at the New Testament word, it means the very same thing, to be separate, distinct. To say that God is holy then is to say that God is distinct, that He's separate, that He is not what we are. That He is not what any created being is. Nothing is comparable to God. No one is comparable to God. He is incomparable, incomprehensible, unfathomable, inexpressible, unspeakable, infinite perfection. And that is why His name is Holy.

To say God is holy is to say that He is completely different from us. And, of course, different from us because He is infinite in being. Because He is infinite in power. Because He is infinite in wisdom.

Because He is infinite in knowledge. And because He is infinite in moral perfection, utterly without sin. And that's why Exodus 15:11 says, "Who is like You, majestic in holiness?" First Samuel 2:2, "There is no one like the Lord. Indeed, there is no one besides You." Psalm 111, "Holy and awesome in His name." Habakkuk 1:13 says, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can't look at wickedness." Job 34:10 says, "Far be it from God to do wickedness and to do wrong." And many times in Leviticus, God says, "I, the Lord your God, am holy." And it's quoted in 1 Peter 1:15, "I am holy." And the echo comes in Revelation 15:4 at the end of the Bible, "You alone are holy." And there are many, many more statements regarding God's holiness.

To say that God is holy is to say that He is separate from us. He is not a creature like we are. He is not sinful like we are. He is not limited like we are. His holiness is His utter otherness. And dominating that uniqueness and that separation and that distinctiveness of God, dominating that is absolute moral perfection. It is impossible for God to sin. He has no capacity to do that, because He is perfect. No one can even say when he's tempted, "I'm being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone, James says.

Now, if you wanted to study the holiness of God, you could go anywhere in Scripture, to any point of His revelation, and you would see a manifestation of His holiness, of His moral perfection, because He cannot reveal Himself without revealing that perfection. Any disclosure of God, any manifestation of God, any revelation of God is a manifestation of His absolute holiness. You could go back and study the holiness of God from the Creation. When God made the universe and looked at what He had made, it says in Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that He had made and, behold, it was very good." Ecclesiastes 7:29 even says He made man upright, not physically, but morally. Why? Because God couldn't make anything or do anything that wasn't morally perfect.

The Creation in its totality, not only the details were good, but the Creation in its totality was very good...Man was created in...in God's image, free from sin, free from evil. So you could look more closely at the Creation in its original state and see there a manifestation of God's moral perfection. Or you could look into the Old Testament at the law. If you were to look at the law that God gave to Moses, here, again, is a revelation of God. And that revelation of God is reflective of His moral perfection again. That's why Romans 7:12 says, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good." There is nothing in the laws that God has made that is anything other than morally perfect.

Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect." Perfect. And in the book of Leviticus, God says, "Obey My laws and obey My statutes and obey My rules, for I am holy." Everything that comes from God is holy. James even calls the law of God, the perfect law. You could look at God's judgments. The Old Testament is full of decisions God made to bring about judgment on people and nations. All His verdicts, all His adjudications from the divine bench, as the Judge of all the earth, are holy. Genesis 18:25 says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And 2 Timothy 4:8 says, "The

Lord is the righteous Judge." Every judgment He makes is a righteous judgment from a righteous Judge.

You could look at Heaven. God has given us in the Bible glimpses of Heaven. And when you look at heavenly glory, what you see is holiness. You can go to Isaiah chapter 6, and you can see the holy glory of God in the vision that Isaiah had of the throne of God in Heaven. Or you can go to Ezekiel chapter 1 and see the incredible vision that Ezekiel had of the holiness of God...in Heaven. Or you can go to Revelation chapter 4, and you can see the amazing vision that John had of Heaven when he saw a throne, and the throne was sparkling jewels and blazing light and surrounded by angelic beings. And out of the mouths of those angels came this "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts." It is impossible for God to manifest Himself anywhere at any time in any way and not manifest His absolute moral perfection. You could even go to hell and look at hell and understand hell. And you would see there the moral perfection of God.

There is no greater proof of God's moral perfection than hell. Hell has to exist, because God cannot have anyone in His presence who is unholy. And if sinners are not covered by the righteousness of Christ and forgiven for their sin, they must be put out of His presence. Hell exists because God is holy. He is the One Who destroys both soul and body...in an eternal judgment.

You could see the holiness of God in the sacrificial system by which He requires atonement for sin. You could see the holiness of God in ceremonies which were emblematic of the need for cleansing and washing. You can see the holiness of God in the temple and the tabernacle, in the holy of holies, the place where no one could ever go except the high priest once a year and with great fear and trepidation, symbolizing the presence of God as absolutely holy and separated from sinners. We could look at all of those things and more. We could look at even the perfumed incense that was used in temple worship, which was to be holy unto the Lord, a mixture used for nothing else to illustrate the fact that God was utterly unique.

But I'm convinced that the greatest manifestation of the holiness of God is found in another place. In fact, it is in the New Testament. The most magnificent manifestation of the holiness of God ever is in the incarnation. The incarnation. Because here is holiness in moral action on earth, visible, perceivable. The revelation of God's holiness, most clear, most powerful, comes in Jesus Christ. And it's more bold and more vivid and more magnificent than any other manifestation, because it's on earth. And that is to say you have holiness against the backdrop of sin.

The real test of holiness is not can it survive in Heaven. The real test of holiness is can it survive here. The real test of God's holiness is not can He be holy when He sits on His throne in the perfect Heaven surrounded by perfect angelic beings. The real test of holiness is can He remain holy when He's here with imperfect, wretched sinners. When He's thrust into a planet dominated by Satan. When He's personally assaulted by Satan and by demons who do everything they can to pollute Him.

When He's attacked and maligned and hated and vilified and persecuted and rejected, can His holiness survive that surrounding by sinners.

In John 1:18 it says, "No man has seen God at anytime. The only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." The best explanation of God is Jesus. Hebrews 1 essentially says that same thing a different way. "He...meaning the Son of God...is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature." If you wanna know what God is like, look at Christ. He's the exact representation of God's nature. So when you wanna see God, you look at Christ. There is no clearer view of God; and, therefore, there is no clearer view of God's holiness. Everything about Jesus speaks of holiness.

We have been studying, as you know, the Gospel of Luke, and that's...that's a good place to consider this very issue. You could look at the birth of Jesus. Luke 1:35, the angel says to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason, the holy Offspring shall be called the Son of God." You're going to have the Messiah. You're going to have the Son of God, and He will be a holy Offspring. You could look in the third chapter of Luke at verse 22 where, at the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit descends on Him and the Father speaks out of Heaven and says of Christ, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased." This, again, is an affirmation of His holiness. There was nothing about Him that displeased God, the Father. You could study His holiness from his birth and from his baptism. You could study His holiness from his life. Obviously, He lived in the midst of wickedness.

In the fourth chapter of Luke, He is confronted by a demon, an unclean demon, a filthy demon, who cries out at Him in verse 34, "Ha, what do we...meaning there were perhaps more of them there, or he's including all the demons in his comment...what do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are--the Holy One of God!" This is demonic testimony. And they were terrified of Jesus, terrified. "Is this the time? Is this the time You destroy us?"

You could look at Jesus at any point in His life. Hebrews 4:15 says He was at all points, chronologically, tempted like as we are, yet without sin. He was tempted as a...an infant. He was tempted as a toddler. Was tempted, He was tempted as a little child. Was tempted as an older child, an adolescent, a teenager, an adult. He was tempted at all points, all the way along His life, but without sin. Augustine once commented on the sign on the fish, ichthus, which is an acrostic for Jesus Christ, God's Son and Savior. And he said this, "It is a suitable sign for Christ, because He was able to live without sin in the abyss of this mortality, as in the depths of water. He came down immersed like a fish in an ocean, immersed in a sinful environment, and untouched by it."

In John chapter 8, He said, "I am from above. I'm not from this world." In the same chapter, He said, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" Later on in chapter 14 of John, He said, "The ruler of this world

has nothing on Me. There is no condemnation that Satan can make against Me." And the reason is given to us clearly in the words of Jesus in Mark 7:18 to 23. This is what He said. "It's not that which goes into the man that defiles him, it's that which comes out of the man." And because there was nothing in Jesus that could sin or would sin, He never sinned. It wouldn't matter what environment He was in.

The test of holiness, again, is not how it holds up in Heaven. It's not how it holds up in a holy environment. The true test of real holiness is how does it hold up in a totally sinful environment. And Jesus was immersed with sinners. Joseph and Mary were sinners. All His brothers and sisters were sinners. Everybody in Nazareth were sinners, and had proved to be truer than true when they tried to kill Him after one sermon preached there. You know, we're warned in the Bible, those of us who are believers, we are warned of the potential danger of the world, aren't we? We're told not to love the world, because all that is in the world is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life is not of the Father, but it's of the world. We're to run from the world. A friendship with the world is enmity with God. We're to touch not the unclean thing. We...we are told by the Psalmist at the very outset, "Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the path of sinners nor sit in the seat of the scoffers." We're told don't hang around the wicked. Proverbs says, "Stay away from the immoral woman. Stay away from deceptive people. Stay away from criminals. Stay away from murderers. Stay away from greedy people. Stay away from lazy people." Why? Because we have such a susceptibility to be influenced by sin, because we're sinners.

First Corinthians chapter 5, the...the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church, "You better take that man in your church who is sinful and put him out of the church because a little leaven leavens...what?...the whole lump." That influence is gonna taint everybody. One rotten apple spoils the barrel. Jesus said in chapter of 12 of Luke, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." Beware of those He later said who...or like the rich fool who loved money, beware of those things. I mean, really, we...we're like walking on eggs getting through this world, because we are susceptible to everything. Guard your heart. Guard your mind. Guard your eyes. Choose your friends carefully. First Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company corrupts good morals."

We try to shelter our children. We try to shelter our teenagers. We try to shelter ourselves. We...we try to make sure that we're not over-exposed to evil people, because we know how susceptible we are to sin. And, of course, in Jude, you remember, Jude says, "We have to snatch people who are caught in false religion, like brands out of the burning." You gotta grab them without getting burned yourself. He says, "We gotta go in and take these people who are in vile corruption without getting our own garments stained." This is a tough place for us to live, because we have such a high degree of susceptibility to sin. You might think, then, that when God came into the world, He'd be a monk. You might think that when God came into the world, He'd go in a cave somewhere and isolate Himself from sinners to protect His holiness. Take some kind of monastic vow in isolation from sinners. Try to protect His purity. You...you might think that He would surround Himself and insulate Himself with

only holy men, like all the supposed holy men do when they gather in their little enclaves and stay there for all their life, surrounded only by other supposedly holy people. They are right about one thing. They are right that the world is an evil influence. But I've got news for them. The world is there, too, because all the unregenerate carry the same sin.

Jesus, I suppose, could've picked out the best. I suppose He could've picked out the most religious and the most holy and the most righteous, and spent most of His time around them. He could've sort of hung out with the Pharisees and the scribes, since they never wanted to go near anybody who an open blatant sinner. Maybe He could've insulated Himself there. The point is this: He didn't need to do that. In fact, it was impossible for Him to be corrupted by anybody. He couldn't be corrupted by demons. He couldn't be corrupted by religious hypocrites like Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees. He couldn't be corrupted by the wretched sinners of the culture. In fact, He spent most of His time with the worst, didn't He?...Theologians used to say, using Latin, that He was non posse pecarre. That is to say not able to sin. That's different than posse non pecarre. Posse non pecarre means able not to sin. It is not that He was able not to sin. It is that He was not able to sin. Why? Because there was nothing in Him to sin. It's not what's outside that makes you sin. It's what's inside, and there was nothing inside but holiness.

I have just a few examples in Luke chapter 5, and you who have been with us for the last many, many years in Luke will remember this passage. Luke 5:27, "He went out and noticed a tax gatherer named Levi...or Levi...actually, Matthew is his other name...sitting in the tax office." And you remember now, tax collectors were the scum. They bought tax franchises from the occupying Roman pagan idolaters, and they exacted and extorted taxes from their own people, the Jews. They were the worst of traitors. They were kicked out of the synagogue. They were shunned like lepers. No self-respecting religious leader or self-respecting Jew would go near a tax collector. They also were surrounded by thugs and strong-arm people who went out and collected the taxes that people were reluctant to pay. Their associates were prostitutes and criminals...

Jesus went to this tax collector and said, "Follow Me." Didn't choose a rabbi, didn't choose a Pharisee or a Sadducee, didn't choose a scribe. He chose a tax collector to be one of His disciples. Shocking. And, of course, "He left everything behind, rose, began to follow Him. And he gave a big reception...in verse 29...for Jesus in his house." He wanted to have a party now that he was following Jesus, and he wanted to do what any new believer would do. You wanna get all your friends there together to meet Jesus. And there's a great crowd. And look what kind of people they were. Tax gatherers and others. What were they? Verse 30, "Tax gatherers and sinners." That would be the general category. Just the riffraff, the scum, the muck.

And Jesus, verse 29, says, "Was reclining at the table with them." He wasn't afraid that they would influence Him towards sin. He wasn't afraid that, with the stories they were telling and the talk they were engaged in around the table and the patterns of life that were right on the tip of their tongue and

would easily come out, and their whole approach to everything would somehow pollute Him. In fact, He was more comfortable with those people, because they were sick and knew they needed a physician than he was with the self-righteous who didn't know they were sick and, therefore, wanted no physician.

And in Matthew 11:19, it was so common for Him to be with people like that, that the...the conventional wisdom said this about Him. "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." The worst they could say about Him. He's a glutton. He's a drunk, and He hangs around tax collectors and sinners. Pharisees were shocked by this in verse 30. They said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax gatherers and sinners?" They didn't hang around 'em. And, you know, there was a, there was a point. I mean they were...I wouldn't recommend that anybody hang around that kinda crowd, would you? I wouldn't say to my kids, "Hey, hang around those kinda people." I...I wouldn't do that.

And I...I can understand why the Pharisees said, "Look, we understand our own susceptibility. We need to avoid those kind of people. They're not helpful." Bad company does corrupt good morals. They were right to avoid them. They just weren't free from sin. They were just encased in their own ugly, hypocritical self-righteousness. They were committing all the sins that the sinners were committing, only they were committing 'em in their...minds and in their...hearts. That's where they were lusting and hating and all that. They had no effect on Jesus. In fact, the very opposite happened. Jesus had an effect on them. They didn't make Jesus sin. Jesus made them righteous.

Turn to chapter 7, and here's another just interesting story about Jesus. Verse 36, a...a Pharisee asked Him to come have a meal with him, and...it's one of these deals. The Pharisees did this a number of occasions. And they would invite a...a lot of other Pharisees and it'd be a big event. And Jesus came, and the idea was to question Him and catch Him in His words and indict Him, and so forth, 'cause they resented and hated Him so much. True righteousness is hard to take when you're self-righteous and hypocritical. But, anyway, He went to the house. He reclined at the table, and He wouldn't be affected by their kind of evil, either. But verse 37, so interesting, it...it just fascinates me. "Behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner." Harmatolas means especially wicked, immoral, or filthy. Surely a prostitute. And when she learned that He was reclining at a table in the Pharisee's house, she headed over there. Why? Well, you know, you have to believe that there was something in her that hated her sin. There was something in her that wanted deliverance. There was something in her that wanted relief. But she couldn't approach a Pharisee. She couldn't approach a scribe. She couldn't approach a rabbi, because she was like an untouchable leper. They wouldn't go near anybody like that.

But she, no doubt, had heard that Jesus was willing to talk to people like her, and her...her approach is very interesting. She goes in. She brings an alabaster vial of perfume. Perfume is...is tools of the trade for a prostitute, right? They even wore 'em around their neck on little vials on strings, and they

could just break the top and...and use the perfume. That was part of the seduction. She's comes in. It's a portico. It's an open air thing. She slips through some of the pillars, comes up behind Jesus, verse 38, stands behind Him down at His feet. He's sort of reclining like this. And she stands by His feet. She starts crying. She has to know that this is One who can help her be free from her terrible sin. She's weeping. She began to wet His feet with her tears. She kept wiping them with the hair of her head. This is embarrassing. And then she starts kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume. I mean this is scandalous. It's absolutely scandalous. Verse 39, "When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "Huh, if this Man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who's touching Him. That she's a sinner. Well, that settles that. He's no prophet. If He was a prophet, He would know who this woman is."

Now, she frightened the Pharisees. They panicked. They went the other way when they would see a woman like this. And so would you. No affect on Jesus whatsoever. Absolutely no affect. He was beyond the possibility of sin. Nothing that...that she was doing could elicit anything in His mind but righteous, holy thoughts. Instead of her polluting Jesus, even though well-intentioned, the very opposite happens. Verse 47, "For this reason, I say to you, 'Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven. She loved much. He who has forgiven little, loves little.'" Verse 48, He said to her, "Your sins have been forgiven." Verse 50, He said, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

You see, this is the test of holiness. Holiness is tested not in Heaven, but on earth. Against the backdrop of a sinful environment, you see the absolute perfection of Jesus Christ. Perfectly calm, perfectly untroubled, engulfed in a world of sinners, absolutely sinless. In Hebrews chapter 7 and verse 26, there is a very clear statement, speaking of Jesus Christ, our Savior, it says this: "We have a high priest who is holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, because He doesn't have any." Here is the sum of His glorious perfection. He is innocent of any evil. He is undefiled. All His contact with demons, with Satan, with sinners, be they religious or be they wicked, left no spot on Him. "He's a lamb without blemish and without spot," 1 Peter 1 says. "Separate from sinners." He's a different class of being. There is holy again. He's a different class of being, a different category of being. He's an uncreated being, an eternal being, exalted above the heavens. That is as if to say he's not of this earth. In fact, 1 Peter 3:19 is sort of the final test, I think. 1 Peter 3 verse 18, we pick it up there. "Christ died for sins...picture here of His death...the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God...now listen carefully to what this says...having been put to death in the flesh...His body crucified...but alive in the spirit." The question is where was His person? Where was His living, eternal being? Where was His Spirit when His body was dead? Verse 19 tells you. "In...in which...in His Spirit, He went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison."

Without going into a lotta detail, prison is hell where the demons had been cast, and He went into hell and made a proclamation of His triumph. His body is dead on the cross, down from the cross, in the tomb. And while His body is dead, His Spirit goes to hell and there He pronounces His triumph over

demons. Colossians 2 says He makes an open display of triumph over principalities and powers. He showed up in hell to announce His victory. Jesus could go to hell and still be holy.

But there's one other place that I wanna draw you to, and that gets us to this table. We see His holiness not only in His birth, not only in His baptism, not only in His life, but we see His holiness in His death. Turn to 2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Corinthians 5:21. Here is this glorious statement. "God...end of verse 20, the antecedent...God, He made...that is God made...Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf. He made Him who knew no sin...to be sin on our behalf." He was the sinless sacrifice. He was the lamb without blemish and without spot. And, yet, God made Him sin...on our behalf, for us. What does that mean? Well, there's a lotta teaching out among the word faith people and the charismatic movement, very popular teaching that Jesus became a sinner on the cross and went to hell for three days to suffer for His sin, after which He was raised from the dead.

That's, of course, blasphemous and doesn't understand the nature of Christ. He could not sin. He did not sin. He was not sinful. That's why hanging on the cross, He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" There was no reason in Him for this. That's why He could pray in the Garden, "Let this cup pass from Me." He didn't deserve this suffering. You say, then, "In what...in what sense was He made sin?" One sense and one sense alone. It must be understood. He make Him who knew no sin, sin for us. In this sense, Jesus was not a sinner on the cross. He was as holy as He as always been and will always be eternally. He was not a sinner on the cross. Here's the point. But God treated Him as if He was. It is an imputed sin. God, as it were, imputed all the sins of all the people who had ever believed in Christ and punished Him for them all, though He was guilty of none of them.

To put it more practically, God treated Jesus on the cross as if He lived my life and your life. God punished Jesus for our sin. That's the only way He was made sin. He was made sin only in the sense of receiving the punishment for sin, sin He never committed. That's why we say He died a substitute in our place. The just, we just read it, for the...unjust. but He was the just and the righteous and the holy. Here you see the sinless One dying under the wrath of God being poured out against all the sins of all people who would ever believe. He did it for us. It's beyond comprehension what the Lord must've gone through, and He certainly anticipated it in the Garden, thinking about bearing sin.

We all saw the Passion movie. We saw the horrific physical suffering of Jesus. That was minor compared to the mental anguish of the sinless One bearing the punishment of God for sins He never committed. But He endured it willingly and submissively to the Father for our sake in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He took the punishment for our sin, that we might receive His righteousness. God treated Him as if He lived my life, so that He could treat me as if I lived His life.

So when we think about the holiness of God, every point at which God reveals Himself manifests that holiness, but nothing more wonderfully and magnificently and beautifully than the cross. And so as we

come today to the Lord's table, let us see here the Holy One suffering as if He were a sinner. Willing to do it for our sakes.

Father, help us now as we share in this table to have a fresh vision of Your holy glory, and to understand how astonishing it is that One so perfectly holy could ever accept sinners. O, Father, we thank You that Your grace equals Your holiness, Your mercy equals Your holiness, Your love equals Your holiness. And as holy as You are, that's exactly how gracious You are. And as infinitely pure as You are, that's how merciful You are. We thank You, Lord, for...displaying Your holiness on the cross in such a way that we benefit. Through the gift of Christ, Who dies the Holy One for the unholy, the just for the unjust. Now, as we remember His death, bring to mind any sins, any things that...that we should confess to You that we might take in...in a worthy way as we remember His sacrifice.

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